



Tullia Magrini. *Music and Gender: Perspectives from the Mediterranean.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003. viii + 371 pp. \$24.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-226-50166-6; \$70.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-226-50165-9.



Reviewed by Sherifa Zuhur (Institute for Middle Eastern, Islamic, and Diasporic Studies, and Cleveland State University)

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Abandon Binaries—But For What?

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This volume was compiled from several conferences, starting with a symposium of the study group Music as Representation of Gender in Mediterranean Countries, in 1998. The volume provides rich detailed description and insights for ethnomusicologists, ethnographers, and other anthropologists, but was challenging to characterize for this particular list with its emphasis on women and gender studies in the Middle East. Many of the contributors, though not all, focus on gender roles in music, with quite a few providing evidence of role-reversals, or transgressions of the dominant gender order, or “gender-bending.” Several chapters concern dance, lyrics, or archival activities in place of music, and the book might well have been titled *Music, Dance, and Gender*. The editor and many contributors take John Peristiany’s notion that honor and shame characterize the gender relations in Mediterranean (both north and south) countries, and also the gendering of space—male/public, female/private—as the previous compass of ethnographic researchers, agreeing that these constructs are too binary and should

now be abandoned. But for what? That is the question. The development of a new theory of gender that would link the Mediterranean has not been fully iterated, nor are these contributors’ responses consistently revisionist. Magrini’s assertions that the strongly localized musical and performance practices of the Mediterranean present cultural fragmentation rather than unity, and that genres are being transformed anew today, certainly ring true. Through the author’s expositions rather than analyses, one may discern many parallels in this region which, as Magrini also points out, certainly shares historical experiences.

In a theoretically stimulating presentation, Martin Stokes revises his own previous ideas on *arabesk* (in *The Arabesk Debate*, 1992) as a modern genre of the marginal that served to relieve social pressures in Turkey where “a pernicious ‘Orient’ [is] still lodged deeply and inexplicably in the heart of the modern nation-state” (p. 308). In this chapter, his subject is the late, great singer, Zeki M=ren, who performed Turkish classical genres as well as *arabesk*; Stokes explores his problematic image

through Ann Ellingsen's idea that the cross-gendered Turkish performers do not represent deviance, but rather a "gendered decency" (p. 309). Stokes then employs a new paradigm involving the sentimentality and hypergendered performance of Turkish expression (which could be extended to the Arab, Hispanic, and possibly Indian musical and dramatic traditions). Unfortunately, readers unfamiliar with the gender-bending tradition in vocal Turkish classical music may be a bit lost here, since Stokes does not immediately describe M=ren's very "masculine" voice juxtaposed to his very "female" dress; rather, we read M=ren's own defense of his stage apparel. Stokes then comments on M=ren's homosexuality, and explores the various comparisons that have been made between M=ren and Bulent Ersoy, a transsexual performer, consequently introducing various unanswerable questions about the nature of masculinity. I only wish that the magnificent vocal qualities of each singer could have been discussed more in terms of musicality and interpretation, rather than text, diction, or emphasis. Different forms of gender-bending, or the nuancing of gendered performance, are represented in studies of flamenco by Joaquina Labajo, polyphonic singing in Corsica by Carline Bithell, a study of women and *rebetika* by Gail Holst-Warhaft, a selection on women and *rai* by Marie Virolle, and a section on Rom culture and music in Kosovo by Svanibor Pettan. In each case, women or men take on the typical musical roles of the other gender whether through performance venues, instrumentation, or musical genres. For instance, the genres of flamenco or *rebetika* are more strongly identified with men than with women. Sometimes, they assume the appearance of the other gender as well. In addition, the role and imagery of gypsies has strongly shaped public perceptions of flamenco. Labajo illustrates some historical shifts such as lyrics that inform us that women once played guitars, and that the "transgressive" quality of dancer Carmen Amaya's performances made sense historically. Amaya took advantage of her gypsy identity to adopt "male" movements/dances and costuming (trousers) to better display her footwork as part of a now fairly unknown tradition of transvestism of the nineteenth century. Labajo, like Stokes, comments on the impact of a bourgeois audience for the genre. Holst-Warhaft's fascinating discussion of the "shady ladies" of *rebetika* addresses the marginal female presence in the milieu of the docks, the merchant navy, the prisons, and hashish "dens," as well as the subject matter of this "heavy" music, eventually discovered and rehabilitated for the middle class by composer Manos Hadjidakis. She describes major female singers like Rosa Eshkenazi,

Rita Abadzi, and Sotiria Bellou (who was openly gay), and the *rebetisses* (or *haroumakia*, or *mangissa*), the female "fans" as they existed in the lyrics and in real life, for these are the opposite of domestic goddesses—instead, they are hashish-smoking "dervishes," who live on the edge. The genre originated in the caf=s-amans of Asia Minor and was transformed in Greece's bouzouki clubs, while women remained, to some degree, on society's margins, being entertainers, though quite a few attained success in recording and performing careers. Bithell turns our attention to men's previously exclusive performance of polyphonic vocal genres in Corsica, whereas women sang lullabies and laments. As a cultural revival of Corsican music began in the 1970s and 1980s, an all-female group, Donnisulana, was organized and performed polyphonic compositions, while other women became solo singers. Corsican singers acknowledged that they were inspired by recordings of Bulgarian female singers, and so in the modern musical environment, polyphonic singing takes on very different meanings for women and for men. Jane Sugarman's chapter is on the solo dancing, called =o=ek, of the Prespa Albanians that differs from women's line dancing and men's dance forms. She highlights the history of this dance genre, as well as its recent popularity as a hyperfeminized and sexualized type of performance. This form corresponds to belly dance or *raqs sharqi* of the Arab countries, =ifteteli of the Turks and Greeks, and the dance of the same name of the Serbs, Macedonians, Bulgarians, and Roma (gypsies), the last group discussed by Carole Silverman. Sugarman surveys the literature on the groups of dancing boys and women (=engis) who performed in the Ottoman era including those that covered the Balkan regions, noting that some prejudice against their performances derived from their expense, and that dancers were accused of being immoral. The now shadowy =engi legacy reappears in certain dance forms and in the latest popular method of combining Prespa dance forms, or shimmying in "Turkish" style, in nightclubs, suggesting to Sugarman an evolution in feminine presentation in public. Silverman is concerned with Bulgarian and Macedonian Roma women including the singing star Esmâ Redzepova, and the modernist crafting of her career as a Roma singer. Roma women performed professionally on instruments as well as vocally, observing the gendering of space in performance venues. As for their =o=ek performances, Silverman's interlocutors differentiate between the older, covered, and respectable Roma version and the newer, Bulgarian/Turkish belly dance. The sensibility of a "respectable" femininity, whether Prespa, Roma, or Greek, is juxtaposed in these three

chapters to the dance or musical tradition that appears to flaunt or contradict it—and yet lies beside, beneath, and with the other forms. Svanibor Pettan provides the most traditional account of the Roma in Kosovo with regard to sex roles and men’s dominance in instrumental music generally and then among the Roma. But then, Pettan goes on to describe Roma women’s contrarian adoption of singing “to the copper pan,” a form that had belonged to non-Roma and the sworn virgins, a transgender and transvestite group (Roma and non-Roma women), who took on men’s roles and appearance, and performed men’s music. Kosovo Rom men who play frame drums (a woman-associated instrument) and sing are called *talava*, but after the observation that this last form has moved from the private into the public sphere, this chapter ends without deep analysis of these “transgressive” examples. Karin van Nieuwkerk’s topic strongly differs from the other chapters, in that she is not concerned with the description or interpretation of a genre, but rather with its negation and seeming demise. She, like Lila Abu Lughod, deals with the phenomenon of entertainers who give up their craft to be “reborn” as Muslims and adopt the *hijab* in Egypt. Since van Nieuwkerk’s current research focuses on Muslims in the Netherlands, rather than in Egypt, it is difficult to accept the opinions of Dutch converts or Yusuf al-Qaradawi as the *dernier mot* on the status of singing or dance according to “Islam.” Employing the typical totalization of both religion and culture, this Islamist discourse ignores the myriad of vocal, instrumental, and dance forms performed by Muslims, many of which are characterized as religious music. But certainly belly dancers and actresses in Egypt have been a target of the new discourse of sin and repentance. I agree with van Nieuwkerk’s conclusion that the Islamist attacks on “pagan art” are a one-way street, and not very useful in determining the “true religious feelings” (p. 284) of performers, but rather a kind of modern passion play, and one that lower-class performers cannot afford to finalize, as they are obliged to make a living. Gofredo Plastino describes the history and changes of a different dance form, the tarantella in Calabria, where Gypsies also perform and are similarly separated from the other inhabitants on the basis of ethnicity, and where traditional festivals have reappropriated and reinterpreted aspects of performance such as processional dance. The au-

thor draws some parallels between the “new” Calabrian women and their dance traditions.

Deborah Kapchan explores the concept of *nashat*—a state, or condition of celebration—precisely, I suppose, what Islamists would most like to eliminate from life in the region—women’s exuberant and sensual enjoyment of dance, music, trance, food, and companionship in festive and celebratory settings in Morocco. Bordering on or related to intoxication and possession, Kapchan highlights the sensuality of this mode, which is also closely related to *tarab*, the state of enchantment and ecstatic enjoyment that I and others have written about elsewhere. Whereas *tarab* is more properly elicited by a performer, *nashat* emerges from the joy of the participants in a successful event. Kapchan writes about its presence in female-dominated and mixed settings, and hence gender plays the roles of sensuality and, according to the author, of seduction, though not literally. Terry Joseph’s work on Berber women’s songs is reminiscent in some ways of Lila Abu Lughod’s work on the bedouin and that of Smadar Lavie and Steve Caton, in that the ability to write lyrics is interpreted as a form of social power, and one has the impression that the ethnographer expects the guarding of sexual honor not to be transgressed in song, although it may be. Edwin Seroussi writes of another example of women’s involvement with song writing, in this case, transcription and archiving of Sephardic songs. The key figure in this chapter is Emily Sene, a Turkish Jew who relocated to Havana, Cuba, and from there to the United States, and collected and transcribed music for most of her life, providing a portrait of her community, and its images of women, love, and life. Marie Virolle’s shorter piece on women’s roles and representation in *rai* is a welcome addition, since other work focuses on men, and it is only men who have attained stature as *rai* singers outside of the country. Philip Bohlman’s chapter fittingly closes the volume as he discusses songs and genres that map a sacred landscape, separated as they may be by religious tradition or era, moving from the early Mediterranean ballad to shrine, pilgrimage, and saints’ songs to a modern Israeli ode to the land. The contributors have shown that the profane (*rebetika* and *rai*), the quotidian, and the sentimental aspects of song and dance also link the Mediterranean as well as “sacred song.”

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